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ABSTRACT

This study examined the role of college faculty work outside their higher education institution. The study took place at a mid-sized comprehensive state university in the rural Midwest. Faculty (N=400) were surveyed regarding the critical events in their careers. Analysis of the 179 usable questionnaires involved grouping of career events according to the settings in which they took place: schooling, academic career, work outside academia, and life away from work. Outside work was examined in relation to three sets of variables: personal, academic, and chronological. Findings included the following: (1) faculty listed between one and 19 career events with the average being 7.33 and older faculty tending to list more; (2) 23 faculty listed 31 military service events; (3) 21 faculty listed 51 public school teaching or administration events; (4) 27 participants listed 61 business or industry events; (5) 34 people listed 70 professional practice or performance events with women listing more events in this category. Overall, half of the faculty listed outside work events that they considered significant in the development of their academic careers. Experiences in business and industry were more likely to occur before the final degree was received. Public school experiences often represented a career step toward academia. (Contains 21 references.) (JB)

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The Role of Outside Work in Academic Careers

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Abstract

This paper focuses on faculty work *outside* the academy. What we know about the impact of outside work experiences is limited, although half of the faculty in this study of career events identified them as critical to their development. Combining interpretive content analysis with standard survey methods, critical career events were grouped and then analyzed. Results suggest that outside work may be more important than generally realized, particularly for those in professions and other marketable fields. As careers become more flexible, faculty developers will need to understand and work with a wider variety of career paths for faculty.

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Studies of faculty life usually focus on the academic career, that is, on work directly connected to an institution of higher education. Work outside the academy is usually ignored or treated as an undesirable interruption. Yet actual career patterns show that outside work in some form is a common experience. Demographic studies show that between half and two-thirds of faculty worked outside academia after finishing college and almost half came to the faculty from other work settings, a pattern more common in two-year colleges, in the professions, and in soft fields [2, 7, 8, 21]. Periods of outside work during an academic career, while infrequent overall [12], are proving significant in the careers of academic women. Women accommodate their careers to family needs more than men do [1, 13] and "career disruption" is one model currently being explored to explain continuing findings of lower salaries and rates of promotion and tenure for women, despite equal levels of productivity [20, 24].

Outside work may become more important as boundaries between the private sector and higher education become less clear. There are signs that outside work is moving into the academy in the form of increasingly explicit contracts between businesses and universities [10, 11], yet the increased role of universities in economic development has not been accompanied by systematic review or revision of personnel policies [9].

Outside work has different functions and impacts for faculty in different fields. For those in the professions, career options outside the academy may be more plentiful and more lucrative than those within. In other applied fields, moving into academia from outside work represents career advancement; moving, for example, from teaching high school students to conducting research and training future teachers. Some faculty enter academia as a second career unrelated to their earlier work; acceptance of nontraditional careers patterns appears to be increasing [18].

All of these factors suggest that those who study higher education and those who work with faculty need to know more about career experiences outside the academy and the extent to which faculty view these experiences as important to their career development. This paper is drawn from a study of critical experiences in faculty careers, focusing on the work experiences outside academia that faculty listed as critical to their career development. Three questions were addressed: What proportion of critical career events represent work outside academia? What kinds of events are reported? What relevant patterns of events can be identified?

Methods

This study took place at a mid-sized comprehensive state university located in the rural Midwest. Faculty received a survey asking them to describe the critical events in their careers. The survey also asked for educational and career histories, career goals, and personal data such as age, sex, and marital status. From a sample of 400, faculty returned 179 usable questionnaires (44%). The respondents included 142 men and 37 women, and 28 minority faculty. There were 56 full professors, 58 associates, and 65 assistants; 67% were tenured.

The original sample was stratified by sex, disciplinary area, and rank. Because response rates were lower than desired, analyses were conducted to compare respondents and nonrespondents; responses were proportional across the sample strata of sex, disciplinary area and rank.

Critical events. Not all faculty described career events in the same way. Many listed actual events such as:

Enlisting in the Air Force.
Elected to the School Board.
Accepting my first position as a professional dietician.

Others included decisions, realizations, or descriptions as well as ongoing or emerging conditions:

Teaching preschool children.
Move to Texas for a rural medical practice.
Decided on a career change.

Some faculty described multiple events in a single space, or explained the reasons or significance of an occurrence:

Gulf Oil acquired by Chevron. Decided it was time to get out. My former thesis advisor suggested that I look into at position at ___.

I was assigned duty to paddle unruly children during lunch hour. This gave me a bad start in teaching.

Instrumental in forming a cooperative repertory dance company, which meant that my career was not limited to working only in New York City.

Each entry was therefore coded into as many categories as appropriate, resulting in multiple codings for many responses. Career events were

grouped according to the settings in which they took place: 1) schooling, 2) the academic career, 3) work outside academia, and 4) life away from work. Only work outside academia is considered here, subdivided into events related to military service, business and industry, elementary and secondary schools, and professional practice or performance; faculty consulting was not included. Outside work events were examined in relation to three sets of variables: personal, academic, and chronological.

Personal variables. These included sex, marital status, and number of children. Marital status reflected current status only, not marital history; many unmarried faculty were divorced or separated.

Academic variables. These measures included rank, tenure, and disciplinary area as defined by Biglan [4, 5]. The Biglan classification, based on empirical studies of faculty and academic departments, divides disciplines into eight groups based on three criteria: whether the discipline is hard or soft (in the Kuhnian sense), pure or applied, and deals with life or nonlife systems.

Chronological variables. Although measures of time are often used to study career development, satisfaction, and productivity [6], different measures of age and tenure are seldom compared. Morrow and McElroy's [17] study of job commitment and satisfaction among public employees showed the value of using multiple measures in a single study. This study included four measures of time: age, the number of years since receiving a terminal degree (the beginning of the disciplinary career), the number of years since the first academic position (the beginning of the academic career), and the number of years at this institution (the beginning of the organizational career). All of the chronological variables were correlated; coefficients ranged from .71 to .87. Therefore, when two or more of these measures appear in the same equation with opposite signs, the interactions indicate significant patterns.

Analyses. Stepwise multiple regression was used to assess relationships between each variable set and the events. A backward-stepping procedure ensured that all relevant variables and interactions were considered. ANOVA was used to analyze academic rank. For all analyses, the number of events reported in each setting became the dependent, or criterion, variable. All findings are significant at $p < .01$ unless otherwise noted.

Findings

Faculty listed between one and 19 career events. The average number of events listed was 7.33; the mode was 8. Older faculty tended to list more

career events and those listing more events overall were more likely to include outside work. 89 faculty (49.7%) included one or more events from work outside academia in describing their careers.

Table 1 presents significant results (adjusted R² and beta weights) from the regressions. Older faculty in applied fields who had begun their academic careers more recently and joined this institution more recently listed more outside work events. Overall, women did not report more outside work events than men, although there were differences across work settings. Several of the chronological variables proved significant, but rank and tenure did not, confirming that rank is not the variable of choice for studying patterns of academic career development (although promotions in rank can represent important milestones) [3].

Table 1. Beta weights and adjusted R² for outside events

	Military	Business	Public	Professional	Overall
		& Industry	Schools	Practice	
<u>Personal</u>					
sex (male)	--	.25	--	-.16	--
# children	--	--	--	.13	--
<u>Disciplines</u>					
soft (vs. hard)	--	--	.18	--	--
applied (vs. pure)	--	--	.14	.24	.35
life (vs. nonlife)	--	-.21	--	.20	.12
<u>Chronological</u>					
age	*.16	.57	.38	.23	.84
years since degree	--	-.38	--	.52	--
years in academia	--	--	-.42	-.56	-.29
years at institution	--	-.25	--	-.22	-.52
Adjusted R ²	*.02	.14	.12	.36	.30

*p<.05, all others p<.01

R² indicates the proportion of the variance in the criterion variable explained by the predictor variables; beta weights provide a standardized measure of the impact of each variable.

Military Service. 23 faculty listed 31 events in this category, ranging from one to three per person. Ten simply noted that they had served. Three described their military experiences as having a negative impact on their careers because of the experience itself or the interruption it caused:

WWII interrupted my progress toward a B.S. degree and delayed it 3 1/2 years.

Trauma of returning to civilian life, now four years behind peers. I want a practice and am uncertain as to my earning capacity. My wife wants a home as a first priority. Marital stress – became a workaholic, working 80+ hours per week.

Wanted pre-med until I served four years in the medical corps; somewhat disillusioned in this period.

For the remaining faculty, military service had a positive impact on their careers by providing opportunities or leading to a clarification of career goals, even though the actual experiences were in some cases traumatic:

Military security agency – opportunities for leadership, further focused educational goals.

Experience as a soldier in Europe during the Second World War, including capture in the Battle of the Bulge and imprisonment in Germany, including surviving the firebombing of Dresden with Kurt Vonnegut. These experiences led me toward the study of European history, to understand why!

Only age was related to the number of events listed in this category, and its significance was marginal. More men than women listed such events (14.8% vs. 5.4%), but the difference was not significant, perhaps due to the small sample. In most cases, military service occurred before faculty had received their final degrees. Only three faculty entered the military after graduate training – an engineer and two physicians. All military events occurred before the academic career began. Hogan [14] argued that military service should be viewed as a traumatic event, in part because it puts an individual behind his age cohort; yet this seemed true for few faculty in this sample.

Public School Teaching and Administration. 21 faculty listed 51 events in this category, ranging from one to six events per person. Most faculty taught public school by choice, although two women reported entering teaching when they could not find other work after relocating with their spouses. Twelve faculty described various teaching experiences; twelve

listed transitions:

I taught elementary school. I was in the middle grades when I started – the first year was horrendous, I was too idealistic.

— Central School -- this was a decade of building teaching skills.

I transferred to another school where I was very happy for three years. There was a range of students there from nonreaders to university kids – I was in heaven.

Moved from junior high mathematics to senior high mathematics and TV coordination. Reason: needed a challenge and upward mobility.

Birth of third child and beginning of career as substitute teacher.

Six faculty reported administrative positions and three described professional service relating to public schooling:

Accepted "interim" position as Director of Staff Development and Federal Programs.

Found a Superintendent 3-year contract. Six weeks later the Board (4 of 5) wanted to break the contract because they didn't know a woman would want to "run the district" like a man!

Critical events in this setting were concentrated in the soft/life/applied fields – chiefly represented by education itself, a field in which public school experience is a prerequisite for many faculty appointments. No faculty in the social sciences or life sciences listed such events and few faculty in other areas did so. Women were more likely to list such experiences than men (18.9% vs. 9.9%), but the difference was not significant.

Older faculty who had more recently begun their academic careers listed more public school events. Public school teaching usually occurred before faculty had received their final degrees and entered academia, although four faculty reported promotions to administrative positions after receiving their doctorates. Two faculty reported teaching after completing their graduate training; one was underemployed following a relocation and the other had a masters rather than doctoral degree. Only one faculty reported professional involvement with schools after beginning his academic career, in a project to establish a teacher training program.

Business and Industry. 27 people listed 61 events in this category, ranging from one to five per person. 5.4% of the women and 17.6% of the

men reported events in this category. Older faculty who had received their degrees more recently were more likely to list these events.

Faculty in nonlife fields listed more outside work in business and industry; these experiences were concentrated in engineering and business, although faculty in the social sciences and hard sciences also reported some involvement. The most significant subcategories seemed to divide events occurring before and after receiving the final degree.

Work in business and industry that occurred after the final degree, when the faculty member was fully qualified to begin an academic career, represented an alternate career choice. These faculty were much more likely to be in engineering or the hard sciences:

Decision to leave the field of academics in order to pursue more vigorously my research interests, and due to disagreements with the prevailing view held by my superiors.

Completed Ph.D. work by __. The immigration office forgot to send me my permanent residence card for six months. I went to work for __ Plastics instead of [another firm] because the permanent residence card was not sent when it was issued.

Work results not accepted by employer; research results were ignored and suppressed. Decided to seek "academic freedom" in the university setting.

After three months with an oil company began seeking an academic position - was unhappy with the career pattern.

Outside work that occurred before graduate school represented a broader array of experiences. The single largest group included four faculty who had pursued business careers with a B.A. or M.B.A. before returning for their doctorate. A few worked in engineering with an undergraduate or masters degree. Others reported previous work experiences that included civil service, sales, and owning a restaurant:

A new company policy to upgrade staff. Decided to go for the Ph.D. Shifted to project management.

After a few years, I realized I was not the marketing type. It took too much to dot all the i's.

Completed by B.S., took a position with a large chemical company, and was married. I was idealistic as a teenager, this now had an

opportunity to develop.

Moved from sales position to teaching mathematics in the __ Public Schools. Reason: needed a challenge and upward mobility.

Professional Practice or Performance. 34 people listed 70 events in this category, ranging from one to five per person. Women listed more events in this category than men (24.3% vs. 17.6%); those with more children also did so. Faculty who were older, had held their degrees longer, but had come to academia more recently listed more of these events. Faculty in applied, life fields (both soft and hard) listed more events. A breakdown by disciplinary area showed that this category was dominated by the health sciences. Some faculty in the fine arts, in psychology, and in social service fields also reported professional involvements as critical career events.

Important subcategories were again determined by the timing of the professional experience. Most faculty completed final degrees, entered private practice, then moved to academia; this group included physicians, psychologists, nurses, a journalist, a dancer, and an attorney. A smaller group pursued a professional career with a bachelors or masters degree, then returned to graduate school and entered academia, including a dietician, an architect, a civil servant, a therapist, a school psychologist, and a musician. Most of the reported events simply noted that a professional career had occurred. A few listed special professional achievements or events which led to the academic career:

Becoming a newspaper reporter.

Moved to NYC. Accepted as soloist in a dance company. Realize I am not interest in dancing only and leave the company to begin work as a solo artist.

Planned and built a proprietary hospital of 54 beds which grew to 200 beds.

Pleasant experiences training fourth-year medical students in my office and in the ER.

Conclusions

Half of the faculty listed outside work events that they considered significant in the development of their academic careers. Since all faculty would not consider such events to be critical to career development, the actual occurrence of outside work is probably higher.

Academic careers follow different paths over time. While one time measure was often insignificant, in combination they revealed distinct patterns. Consider the interactions between age, disciplinary career (years since degree), and academic career (years in academia). Experiences in business and industry were more likely to occur before the final degree was received and therefore before the individual was considered a full member of the discipline. In public schooling, the onset of the academic career is delayed; it was more common for these faculty to return to work outside academia after receiving the doctorate. In professional practice and performance, the significant positive weight for degree in addition to age emphasizes that the final degree is a requirement for professional practice, even when the academic career begins later. Looking at one measure of time only, as is typically done in faculty career studies, would not have shown these patterns.

Public school experiences represented a career step toward academia. Some faculty had extensive public school careers before beginning their academic careers. Most people in this category became faculty members in schools of education; a few stayed with the discipline in which they taught (mathematics or industrial arts, for example). Work in the business sector and professional practice served as both career steps and alternate choices for faculty in different disciplinary areas, although the number of faculty who pursued alternate careers in any setting was small. Only physicians and clinical psychologists routinely continued to practice after beginning their academic careers; for others, involvement in outside professional work had a very different character once the academic career began.

Events analyzed in this category did not show many instances of career disruption for women. This is more a function of the coding scheme, however, than of the data. Personal events were coded in a separate category and analysis of those events showed that career disruption was significant for married women [15].

Implications

This study and others show that faculty value outside work experiences and see them as significant in their academic career development. For psychologists, nonacademic work was not a barrier to advancement in an academic career, except in elite universities. [20] Psychology is a highly differentiated field with many opportunities for outside work, however, and may not be typical in this regard. It is interesting to note, therefore, that faculty at liberal arts colleges gave higher ratings to a career model that included a mixture of outside and academic work than to the classic linear approach. [3, 19]

The relationship between a particular discipline and the private sector will affect the relationship between members of the discipline and the academy. The wider career opportunities of faculty in the professions and in highly marketable fields are typically reflected in their salaries. The impact of these salary differentials on faculty morale has been understood, if not addressed. Seldom considered, however, is how wider career opportunities affect faculty commitment to the institution, or their image of themselves as faculty members. Exploring outside work experiences in consulting with faculty, and developing a deeper understanding of disciplinary differences in this area, will add new dimensions to research and faculty development efforts.

Faculty developers might also keep in mind that not all "junior" faculty are novices. In applied fields like education, a new faculty member may have had a successful career in public school teaching or administration before taking a faculty position. Even in pure disciplines, faculty come to academia in different ways. Life experiences will certainly affect values, attitudes and skills, and can represent important resources for faculty development.

The academy is conservative, resisting both the appearance and the reality of change. The image of the academic career as a smooth progression from undergraduate to graduate school, and on to a series of advancing faculty appointments will persist far longer than it reflects the actual experiences of faculty. Faculty developers, however, work with real faculty and cannot afford to be seduced by traditional norms. We must learn about actual faculty experiences and values to work with them effectively. Clearly, outside work experiences merit more attention. Considering their impact and timing will enhance our understanding of academic career patterns as well as the professional development needs of faculty in different disciplines.

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